Handilift Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes January 18, 2012

The meeting was held in the 1st Floor Conference Room of the Hood building on S. President Street. Attending today's meeting was: Dr. Scott Crawford, Chairperson; Rev. Sam Gleese, City ADA Coordinator; Ms. Traci Brent, City of Jackson Transit Services/ADA Transportation Accessibility Coordinator, Mr. Sam Tensley, JATRAN General Manager (PTM), Mr. Dewayne Cheatham (JATRAN's Head of Operations), Ms. Lee Cole, Ms. Ollie Lester (Representing the Addie McBryde Center for the Blind), Mr. Dewone Banks, Mr. Jason Bunch, Mr. Fred Myers, Attorney Kay Hardage (DRMS), Ms. Larita Smith (JATRAN Handi-Lift Consumer), Ms. Karen Robinson (JATRAN Handi-Lift Dispatcher), City Attorneys Azande Williams and Monica D. Joiner, and Mr. Rusty Ferguson (Willowood Developmental Center).

The meeting convened at 1:06pm.

After brief introductions, the November 2nd Minutes were read by Ms. Karen Robinson. There were a couple of minor changes. Mr. Fred Myers motioned to approve the Minutes as amended, with a second by Mr. Banks, and the motion carried unanimously.

JATRAN's ADA Transportation Accessibility Coordinator Update:

Ms. Brent (JATRAN's ADA Transportation Accessibility Coordinator) gave the following update on ordering new Handilift buses: they have not yet been ordered. Apparently, the State's contract did not include the price of additional wheelchair securement locations, and according to Ms. Brent, officials at MDOT would not approve amending the contract to include that additional expense. The plan is to "piggyback" funding for new Handilift buses to another purchase order. Dr. Crawford asked when this might occur, and Ms. Brent replied "March". Dr. Crawford expressed disappointment that once again, Handilift buses allocated for this fiscal year would likely not be on the road until next fiscal year, noting that it took six months to get the last set on the road (ordered March 2011 and in service by October).

Old Business:

I. Dr. Crawford mentioned that there appears to be a problem with the thoroughness of complaint reports to the JATRAN Monitor (Mr. Russell Thatcher, TranSystems). Reports submitted to him for the months of October through December do not reflect all those reported verbally to JATRAN or Reverend Gleese. Mr. Fred Myers indicated that in December, he called JATRAN dispatch and spoke with a gentleman to change his home address, one week before a pickup. He was apparently given a "no-show" because the information was never entered into the system and the JATRAN operator went to his old address. Mr. Myers said he called JATRAN to complain and asked to speak to Mr. Tensley, but was told he was not in. Mr. Myers also reported the complaint to City ADA Coordinator Sam Gleese. This did not make December's complaint log sent to TranSystems.

Another instance involved multiple complaints from Ms. LaRita Smith. Ms. Smith indicated that she had several problems the month of October, one that was discussed at the last Handilift meeting, but none were included in the log. There was apparently another instance in which she and at least one other person were kept waiting at the "R & D Center" for forty-five minutes because the vehicle arrived early. Ms. Smith added another complaint that occurred "last week" in which she reported running after a Handilift bus as it pulled away: "I was within 10 feet yelling at him to stop!"

Deputy City Attorney Azande Williams said that she would like these complaints and changes of address to be submitted in writing. Dr. Crawford and Reverend Gleese disagreed, noting that not everyone has the capacity to write, and that phone reports should be taken as "reasonable accommodation".

All agreed that "better communication" was needed to ensure that complaints were logged and addressed. Dr. Crawford urged Ms. Smith to please contact JATRAN's Customer Service Hotline with complaints the same day at 601-960-0725.

Mr. Ferguson of the Willowood Developmental Center said that he recently had a complaint from one of his clients regarding Handilift service, but that it had been satisfactorily resolved, adding that overall, Handilift provides "outstanding service."

Ms. Cole expressed frustration that it appeared that multiple Handilift buses were being dispatched to the same place at the same time. Mr. Tensley responded that the new RouteMatch software will sometimes do this depending on the rider's destination or the prior location of the Handilift vehicle. Heretofore, some riders and operators had "regular riders" but the RouteMatch software is disrupting that pattern. Ms. Cole said that it would be best to explain this to the customers of various disability organizations so people will better understand the routing process. Mr. Tensley replied that he did not think it would be practical to visit all the organizations and explain the intricacies of the software's approach. Reverend Gleese interjected that "change is hard."

- II. Chairperson Crawford indicated that as of this morning, the Handilift suspension/denial of service appeals process had not been posted to the City's website. This has been a topic of discussion in both the September and November Handilift meetings. Ms. Brent said that it was submitted to Constituent Services and Information on December 20th, and is still pending.
- III. The next topic was increasing Handilift capacity to meet all next-day trip requests, something that the Consent Decree required by September 30th, 2010. Mr. Cheatham said that starting the beginning of January 2012, that JATRAN increased its weekday shifts from eleven to fourteen, and on Saturdays from two to four.

- IV. Crawford raised an incident he reported on December 3rd. Namely, an operator on Bus #738 failed to kneel the bus when an obviously elderly woman (apparently in her 90's) had difficulty boarding from the street level (the operator failed to go to the curb). The bus operator in question told Crawford at the time that she believed #738's kneeling function would fail if used too often. Mr. Tensley said that there had been problems with 738's kneeler in the past, but that it was working properly now. The newer El Dorado EZ Rider II's have the unfortunate tendency to blow their air bags should the operators move without fully rising from the kneeling position. Ms. Cole said that this was an operator training problem and should not affect customer service. Mr. Tensley agreed, adding that operators have been told, repeatedly, to kneel the buses.
- V. The last agenda item was the reinstitution of the "secret rider program." Mr. Tensley said that JATRAN has a new risk-management agency working with them, which recommended new secret rider evaluation forms. Now that Jackson State University is back in session after the holidays, he expects that there will be secret rider evaluations performed before the March meeting.

Announcements:

Mr. Tensley accepted a position with MV Transit in Visalia, California, and will be leaving at the end of the month. Dr. Crawford spoke for all involved, wishing him well, and thanking him for his "tireless commitment to the JATRAN customers."

Reverend Gleese introduced Ms. Ollie Lester, who will be a regular Handilift Advisory Committee member, representing the Addie McBryde Center for the Blind. Ms. Lester brings experience from serving on other paratransit advisory boards in Detroit, Michigan.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:37pm.

The next meeting of the Handilift Advisory Committee is scheduled for March 21st, 1pm, at the Hood Building first floor conference room.

These Minutes were written by Committee Chairperson, Scott M. Crawford, Ph.D. These Minutes were read and approved at the March 28, 2012 meeting.